THE VISIONARIES

BY ELEANOR M. INGRAM

THE girl on the soap box poised restlessly upon one small foot, her lithe young body swaying as naturally as the blossoming locust boughs above.

"It is dinner-time, Cyprian," she reminded, her coaxing voice honey-sweet, honey-rich. "Even you must be tired now."

"No; please do not move."

"But the dinner——"

"I do not want any dinner."

"Anchorite! I *do*. Never mind, I will keep still; oh, very still. Only you must amuse me."

"Look at the House Across, then."

Her large, bronze-tinted eyes turned to the expanse of shining river between their garden and the high mountains of the opposite shore.

"Yes, one can always look at that," she assented contentedly. "See how rosy it shows in the sunset, as if its marble were quarried from a bank of evening clouds. Such a house; pinnacled, turreted, clothed in towers! I wonder if the man who lives there loves it half so well as we do, dear."

"Certainly not; he must be a practical person or he would not be rich enough to own such an Alhambra."

"Unless he inherited it. But at least he has his dinner. I am convinced he is a sultan; just now he is seated upon a divan piled with gorgeous pillows, in a lofty hall of open arches, while Nubian slaves bring trays of pomegranates and golden dishes of those cream-tarts which Prince Bedreddin was punished for making without pepper."

"Wrong, sister of mine. He is reposing in an oak-paneled dining-room, with hangings of gilded Spanish leather, a Dickensian English footman behind his chair, and eating *rosbif à l'Anglais.*"

"But no. And when he finishes he will go into his rose garden to smoke a chibouk *so* long — all amber and ivory."

"You are behind the times; he will ascend an enormous automobile and drive it through miles of perfumed, dusky country. Ah, the luxury of motion! So, now you may rest; my sketch is done."

"Let me come see," she ran down the improvised steps and came to his chair. "Clever boy; behold our garden a Sicilian terrace, our wooden boxes a flight of mossy stairs, and poor me a dazzling Italo-American countess. So he illustrates one of 'the ten best sellers.' All my compliments, Cyprian."

"It is not right," he said slowly.

"Not—right?"

He put up his hand to clasp the small one on his shoulder, not replying immediately. They were very much alike, this brother and sister; they had the same long-lashed brown eyes, the same rippling red-brown hair, the same delicate animation and depth of expression. But Cecilia's face was tinted with vivid health, her every movement had the

grace of supple vigor; Cyprian sat almost a prisoner to his chair and bore in pallor and languor the stamp of long illness.

"We studied together in Paris, Cecil," he said, his gaze on the drawing before him. "Once you could do this as well as I, although now you care to do it no more. You used to be a keen critic; tell me, is my work good?"

There was something of fierceness in the gesture with which she flung her other arm around his shoulder and pressed her soft cheek against his.

"Good? Why, dear, do you need to ask *me* that? Are you not pursued by authors who beg you to illustrate their books, have not your water-colors been bought as soon as exhibited? Of course it is good; this drawing here—it is as poetically conceived as a verse of Shelley."

"Yes, they give me work. Yet it seems to me that I have the ideas but no longer the power of execution. That the lines are flat, stiff."

"When they appear in the books——"

"In the books," his thin face brightened, "in the books they are all I wish, indeed. You were right this morning; I am overtired and I fancy things. Put away the drawing-board, dolcissima, and tell patient old Joseph we will come eat his dinner. Cream tarts or *rosbif*, as you choose."

Laughing, she stood erect and caught a long silk scarf from the easel.

"Cream tarts to-night, and the garden of nightingales. Look, this is how Marida danced before the Caliph Haroun."

She took a few steps back under the flowering trees, then flashed into a dance as airily light, as daintily trod, as ever an innocent Salome conceived. It was noiseless, without music save of the imagination; the little feet glanced soundlessly over the thick, blossom-strewn turf. She bent, she swayed, her raised arms wreathed the scarf with an art truly oriental, her brilliant eyes and parted lips allured to gayety the watcher opposite. Overhead a catbird commenced his exquisite evening song; the sunset glow painted the air around them a quivering pink.

"'So with her shadow danced Fanchon Fadette,'" exclaimed Cyprian, his accent carrying the rhythm of her motion. "Ah, if I could draw a movement —If your sultan saw you he would steal you away to the House Across. Go on, go on!"

Flushed, panting, she swept him a profound salute and ran over to sink on a cushion by his chair.

"Commander of the faithful, we dine to-night?" she demanded joyously, and let her head rest against his knee.

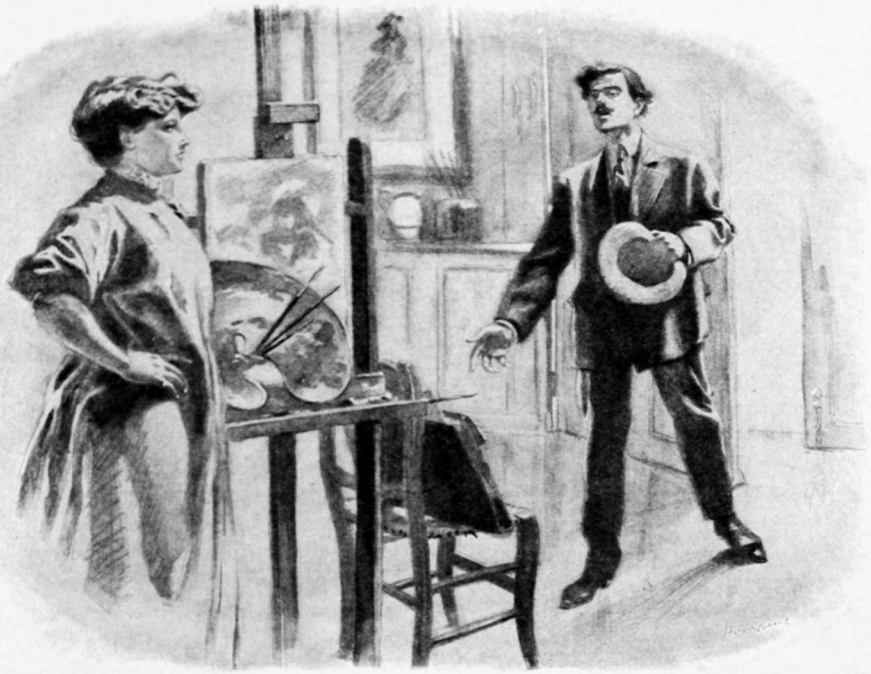
Then, and even then with reluctance, the man at the hedge pushed open the gate and came slowly down the old flagged walk; leaving it presently to cross the clover turf toward the two.

"I beg your pardon," he said, with a certain pleasant hesitation most widely removed from shyness and yet most delightful in a period of over-nonchalance, "Mr. Stanley, I believe?"

The hosts both turned, the startled Cecilia rising swiftly. He was rather shabbily dressed, this young stranger who stood bareheaded, offering his card to Cyprian while he looked at Cecilia with the steady blue eyes so unexpected in contrast with his dark face. Not unduly shabbily, simply with a vague suggestion of the economy that disregards a seam just starting to wear or a crease evanescent; but the circumstance made congenial appeal to Cecilia and she smiled at him, even while rosy with the recollection of her dance. And Cyprian, too, leaned forward in surprised welcome, holding out his thin hand.

"I am glad you came out to us, Mr. Delmar," he declared. "Cecilia, this is Mr. Delmar, for whose book you have been posing this evening."

"Then neither I nor any one else will read the print while the illustrations can be seen," answered Ralph Delmar quite



In the middle of the bare, sunny room Cecilia was standing

calmly and naturally. "That is more than good of you, Miss Stanley."

She showed no anger at the *sans-gêne* of the compliment, but her large eyes dilated, searching his anxiously as she gave him her hand.

"You care for such things; you are a judge of drawing?" she demanded breathlessly.

"I am a mere amateur who looks on; nevertheless I can appreciate what I cannot create, or do," his glance went involuntarily to the long scarf still lying on the grass. "And the illustrations of one's book mean so much that I ventured here to Mr. Stanley in my impatience."

"You will stay to dinner," decided Cyprian as a matter of course. "Cecil, if you will call Joseph——"

She turned to gather the scattered papers.

"Yes; let me take your work in with me, dear."

"Wait; I am going to show Mr. Delmar."

"After dinner, Cyprian. The light here is bad."

"But——"

She lifted her eyes again to the guest's, and under their compulsion Delmar came to wondering aid:

"Surely, let us have the best effect first. You know I am a novice and must be indulged."

Smiling, she swept into her arms the portfolio and went toward the quaintly stiff brick house whose walls disappeared under ivy and honeysuckle.

"Will you not sit down?" suggested Cyprian after a moment.

Delmar withdrew his gaze from the house door to meet the other's, then laughed outright.

"Thank you. I—forgive me, but I saw Miss Stanley dance and I am still bewildered. I thought the world had grown too old for idylls like that."

"This is not the world; it is a little corner the world forgot. Cecilia is not always so frivolous. If you question her she will explain that it was the spell of the House Across."

"The House Across?"

"Across the river."

Delmar turned and looked. A tiny breeze was crumpling the silken blue and mauve surface of the Hudson, a breeze that had struggled across two miles of shining water only to faint wearily out of existence as it almost reached the shore. Over the velvet hills a round pale moon floated up like a nebulous silver bubble over the hills dotted with roofs showing white against the soft green.

"There are so many houses," he objected.

"Yes? Well, ask Cecilia which is the one. We live alone here, we two, and tapestry earth and air with our fabric of dreams. She is coming."

She was coming, flashing through the dusk in her white dress.

"Show Mr. Delmar the House Across before we go, Cecil," her brother directed.

She laughed, surprised, the honey-rich laughter that matched her voice.

"If Cyprian has told you of the House Across, Mr. Delmar, you must have given him the password of the Brotherhood of Visionaries. Look, then, on the mountain top."

Delmar followed the slim lifted arm from which the muslin sleeve fell back, the slender pointing finger. Outlined against the moon stood the massive grace of one of the Hudson's modern castles, softened by distance to Fata Morgana beauty, crowning the stately hill and rearing its towers into the arching horizon.

"Ever since we were children, Cyprian and I, we have played with that splendid toy. We have peopled it with fairies, princes, oriental potentates, our loves of fiction or history old and new. When we went to Paris for three years we grieved for it; when we came home we adored it. Once, before Cyprian's success came and after he was ill, we were—not rich; but we could always revel in our luxurious House Across and enjoy its Barmecide feasts. We are quite barbaric; we like thick, darkly gorgeous rugs, lofty arches and rainbow-dyed walls, the sheen of silk and glint of gems. And all that we find over there."

He drew a quick breath, his face strangely stirred and troubled.

"You are content, like that?"

"Certainly we are content. Long ago we created an owner for it, and we vary his life *à plaisir*. Only we agree that he must be young; I suppose he will grow old with us. Do you think us quite mad?" she flung out her hands in gay deprecation. "Cyprian, Cyprian, come to dinner."

From somewhere an ancient, wirily vigorous serving-man had appeared and now stiffly presented his arm to Cyprian. He was very, very lame, the young artist whose name was becoming synonymous with an exquisite and glowing work all his own. Watching him, Delmar hesitated in his reply to Cecilia.

"I think," he answered soberly, "that it is the most wonderful thing I ever heard. To build those fancies—to feel no resentment because some idle, useless man has the reality with all it means, while you struggle just to live——"

"Hush, you are speaking high treason to Destiny! We are glad some one can possess so beautiful a fact as our House, as we are glad that our neighbor cultivates a garden of roses. You write, oh, I have read your book; you, too, must know how to exist on perfumes and morning mist."

"Perhaps."

"Without doubt."

They went in across the wide porch into the pleasant, faded dining-room, with its fresh scent of locust blossoms.

It was a merry little dinner, although so simple. It was not cream tarts with pepper, or *rosbif à l'Anglais,* but it might have been either from the guest's enjoyment.

"I have no sister, or anyone," he apologized for his obvious delight in it all. "I am alone most of the time. You see, I like Arcadia better than Bohemia.

And, and, I am rather too stupid to find a House Across by myself."

The deep bronze eyes smiled across the table at each other, so like in the glance exchanged.

"You found the road to ours quickly enough," consoled Cyprian. "You know most people never could. Ring for Joseph, dolcissima; it is time to show those pictures of mine."

"Let me do instead of Joseph," Delmar begged eagerly. "I would *like* to."

"I am such a trouble."

"You do not mean that." He involuntarily laid his hand over the one upon his arm.

"You are stronger than Joseph," Cyprian said irrelevantly; but he leaned a trifle more on his companion, and they passed from liking to opening friendship.

Cecilia took a step after them indecisively; she had paled slightly and her fingers twined themselves about the hanging ribbons of her girdle.

"The pictures, already?" she doubted. "The moonlight is so bright, on the porch."

Cyprian tossed a negative over his shoulder.

"No, no. It is to see the pictures that Mr. Delmar has come from New York, not us. Bring them to us, Cecil."

When she entered the sitting-room and Delmar sprang to relieve her of the heavy portfolios her clear eyes caught and detained his.

"Wait," she said, her voice a breath of sound. And as his astonished gaze questioned her: "Afterward, to me; not here."

"Put them on the table beneath the lamp," directed Cyprian, turning. "If you draw that chair closer we can see best——"

There was nothing to do except comply. Cecilia moved to her own low chair and took up a mesh of bright embroidery.

The half-hour that succeeded was very quiet. It was chiefly Cyprian who spoke, explaining scene and chapter illustrated or thought embodied, his pleasure in an intelligent auditor coloring the words. After the first two pictures Delmar had risen and remained standing behind the other's chair, looking over his shoulder. Cecilia drew her needle in and out steadily, never raising the heavy fringe of lashes that swept her cheek. When Delmar finally spoke beyond a monosyllable her fingers stopped, although his tone was most gentle.

"You have altered your style since your last work?"

"No; my style is myself; I can change neither."

"I am clumsy; I would say that this novel had demanded a different treatment from usual."

"No; why?"

A note of anxiety was in the question. Cecilia looked up then, her glance an imperious appeal, an angry command; she laid one hand on the table, as if to rise. Delmar's gesture of reassurance stilled her at once.

"Nothing," he answered tranquilly. "I merely fancied a change. I am not an artist, you know. You have caught the spirit of the story marvelously; I never hoped any one else could so perfectly see the scenes as I saw them."

Cyprian actually flushed with gratification, and the conversation slipped from the dangerous theme. Only once again in the evening did they approach it.

"You have been ill recently, since you exhibited those water colors?" Delmar asked, after a remark of his host's.

"No; my illness came when my success was just commencing. Since then I have achieved most." He sighed reminiscently.

It was Cecilia who colored this time, the creeping scarlet invading even her slim neck as she bent over the embroidery.

When ten o'clock struck, and the guest rose to go, she rose also. Out to the porch she accompanied him and closed the door behind him.

"You have been most good," she said

seriously and gently. "Say it to me now, please."

"Say—what, Miss Stanley?"

"You know; you saw the illustrations and you were disappointed."

"I beg your pardon, I am perfectly content."

She moved her head in denial, standing clothed by the moonlight through the vines in fairy brocade of velvet and silver.

"That is not true. Please let us be frank."

From the foot of the steps he looked up at her.

"Ariele, Ariele, leave me *my* little House Across!" he exclaimed vehemently. "Must you and your Cyprian have all the light on the mountain top, all the perfume and whiteness of life? Let me alone; I who have lived in a mist of my own thoughts and now first perceive the others in the world with me. Let me build myself one gracious room of memory, you magician who have reared yourself a palace."

Startled, she involuntarily leaned nearer to see his face in the wavering light.

"You mean that you want to do this for Cyprian? You mean that?"

"Yes."

Lower yet she leaned and gave him her firm little hand.

"Good night. I had meant to tell you—but, good night."

He went down the uneven flagged walk between the rows of tulips.

"Oh, Cecil," called her brother as she re-entered. "Delmar said he would be up here again if we did not mind; he is taking a vacation in the neighborhood. You do not mind?"

"I do not mind," responded Cecilia softly. "Cyprian, it is a good world."

"Of course," smiled the optimist. "Would you ring for our Joseph, *dolcissima?*"

* * *

The next day Cecilia received a letter, or rather an envelope containing a yellowed leaf torn from some forgotten or ignored volume.

"For to write a book is not for some a pleasure or a task," she read in the high, narrow type, "but a necessity of existence. And the writing is a state of being or intensified life. For such an one dreams and moves and sees in his creation; it is a fair vampire that drains his life into itself. To such an one the least letter of his writing is dearly beloved, and sooner would he give his life for a friend than his book. Yet being a visionary——"

The page ran off in a jagged tear; there was no signature.

A week later Ralph Delmar came up again, quiet, self-possessed, matter-of-fact. They had dinner together, the trio. Afterward Cyprian showed his progressing work while Delmar leaned over his shoulder and Cecilia sat by in her low chair.

When the evening ended the hostess again followed her guest to the fragrant darkness of the porch.

"Why did you send me this?" she asked, holding out her hand in which lay the crumpled page.

"To excuse the moment's hesitation that you saw so well. I am so fatally used to having my own way. I thought you might pardon me more easily if you knew how I cherished everything touching this work of mine."

"Shall I tell Cyprian to leave your illustrations and set you free?"

There was no moon to-night; through the dark he moved a step toward her.

"You will do nothing so cruel. Must I plead for my House Across once more? I am content, and learning."

She caught her breath in a passing sob and leaned against the rustling vine.

"Once he could do all, all you could have dreamed. Now his work is ill, as he is. If he could rest, travel at sea away from all this, it would come back, I know. But you—we pay our debts. Good night; your House Across should be very beautiful."

"I have only set the first stone, and of that the credit is yours. And my debts are beyond my reckoning." He bent his head abruptly over the hand she had given him. "Good night, Lady of Shalott, seeing the world in your magic mirror."

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Honey-sweet, honey-rich, the call floated across the garden. A robin paused, cocking his head and unwarily allowed the miniature anaconda he pursued to slip back into its hole; a fat kitten roused on its cushion to yawn prodigiously.

"I cannot see you, dolcissima," Cyprian protested from his seat under the trees.

"Certainly you cannot," called the rippling voice. "I am in my eerie up here. Look at the House Across; it was never so lovely before. All amethyst and ivory it is this afternoon."

"That is because you are gay, my child; because we sent the last of Delmar's illustrations to the publishers yesterday. I have worked fast in this past month."

"Yes, it is that. Do you know what the lord of the House Across is doing to-night?"

"Tell me."

"He is giving a festival. Already the gold and amber lamps are lit, the fountains of perfumed waters are tinkling as they rise and fall, the silver music tiptoes through the columned halls."

"Why to-night?"

"That is my secret," she laughed down at him from her high window. "Can we not have a festival, you and I?"

"Then ask Delmar to it."

"If he is not here——"

"He is coming in the gate."

"Oh!" she gasped, and the window closed.

But Delmar had seen; excited, brilliant of glance, he came to Cyprian.

"May I?" he asked, almost humbly. "Cyprian, if she will, may I?"

"She is up there," said the laconic Cyprian, but his smile was delicious.

In the middle of the bare, sunny room Cecilia was standing. She wore a gingham painting-apron, its sleeves tucked up to leave her round white arms free, her bright hair was slightly ruffled by the wind and curled its soft tendrils about her forehead. Around were scattered easels, drawing-boards, pencils, in eloquent confusion. On the threshold Delmar stopped.

"The pictures," he said dizzily. "Cecilia, Cecilia——"

"Hush, he must not hear."

"But they are past all praise, they are faultless, marvelous. Ah, help me understand—this room——"

"There is no one in the world who knows. I—copy his work."

"You!"

She put out her hands to entreat silence and he caught them both in his.

"We studied together, and when he was ill this commenced. I dared not let him believe he was what he would call useless. We live out here; when visitors come he rarely shows them his work. Only to you he gave swift friendship. You would not let me tell you, or I would have trusted you long ago."

"So lightly you throw aside fame!"

"But I have Cyprian. And you, did you not give up the heart of your heart for him on the very first night?"

"That was a debt, no gift. Cecilia, I love you, dear."

They were very close together now; she swayed ever so little nearer his eager eyes.

* * *

"Come back to Cyprian," she murmured presently.

"Tell me first that you and Cyprian are coming with me where the real and unreal meet; to find the garden of nightingales and go wandering in drowsy summer seas?"

"You are playing?"

He held her closer.

"Magic lady, I am not playing at all;

I am the man who owns your House Across."

"But—you—write——"

"Yes, I write, and dream, yet for all that I own the House Across. Selfishly enough I have lived in it, until you and Cyprian woke me. Dear, are you coming home to it, to give my Undine place a soul?"

The bronze-tinted eyes filled with laughter, and something else.

"And Cyprian, who said the master of the House Across must be practical. After all, we visionaries——"

LOVELY PEGGY

NARRATING AN ADVENTURE IN A CITY FLAT

BY ELLEN FARLEY

"WHAT is it, Williams?"

At the sound of the opening door, Masters jerked out the question impatiently, his gaze intent on the glowing coals where some charred bits of paper smoldered.

In the dead silence that followed, slowly it was borne upon him that there was an alien presence in the room. He turned his head frowning; then with a suppressed exclamation jumped to his feet.

Leaning back against the closed door, one outthrown hand clutching the knob, stood a woman whom Masters had never seen before. She was breathing quickly and her glance met his with defiant questioning.

"May I lock the door?" Her voice quavered, but she slipped the spring catch without awaiting an answer.

At that he awoke a bit.

"Ah, a book canvasser, I assume," he said with a smile wholly lacking in warmth, being a grim sort of young man where women were concerned and with no relish for the spectacular.

"No," said the girl unsmilingly. Silently she regarded him a moment longer, then announced harshly, "I am running away from my husband."

"Aha," said Masters. He blinked unbelievingly at the tall, slim figure, standing there with outstretched arm against the door. She was clad all in green from the small toque with its long, green feather sweeping over the black gloss of her hair. In fact, he thought whimsically, she was a vision one might expect to meet in some dead-leaved autumn forest, rather than in the bijou modernity of a New York studio apartment.

"That's not a very nice thing to do," he said at last, stupidly, and then blushed at the banality of his spoken words.

"Nice? Nice?" she repeated. Her voice was low but vibrant with a poignant disdain. "Bah—that word. It was *his* word, too. It stands for all the sickening, deadening stagnancy of my life for the last two years. I am soul-weary of the sawdust diet of niceness."

She had moved a step nearer to him as she spoke and, looking at the white face and drooping figure, he pushed a big chair before the fire.

"You look tired," he said grudgingly. "Sit here, won't you?" She sank into the chair resignedly, then flashed a swift glance at Masters. Her eyes were